Health Bits & Pieces

By Dan Kenner, Ph.D., LAc

◆ **Radiation Exposure for Breast Cancer Protection.** The benefit of mammography in screening for breast cancer was questioned by a Danish study. Researchers at the Nordic Cochrane Institute in Copenhagen were "unable to find an effect of the Danish screening program on breast cancer mortality." The same conclusion has been reached by similar studies in other countries. A 2005 study suggested that screening had reduced breast cancer deaths by 25% in Copenhagen, but researchers Karsten Jørgensen and Peter Gøtzsche observed serious flaws in the study design that led to that conclusion and carried out a more comprehensive study. The researchers found that breast cancer mortality declined twice as much in non-screened areas and they suggested that the reductions in breast cancer mortality are probably better explained by changes in risk factors or improved treatment than by screening mammography. [Jørgensen KJ, Zahl P-H, Gøtzsche PC, "Breast cancer mortality in organised mammography screening in Denmark: comparative study," *British Medical Journal,* 2010;340:c1241.]

◆ **Good News about Happiness.** Medical researchers at Wayne State University conducted research that correlates "smile intensity" with longevity. Photographs of baseball players taken in the 1940s and 1950s were rated by independent reviewers according to a smile-rating scheme. The reviewers did not know the purpose of the study. The conclusion was that there exists a strong link between smile intensity and longevity. The average lifespan of non-smilers was 72.9 years, for smilers it was 75, and big-smilers 79.9. [Abel EL, Kruger ML, "Smile Intensity in Photographs Predicts Longevity," *Psychological Science*, April 2010, 21(4): 542-544.]

◆ **Latest News about Happiness and Dr. Feelgood.** The news has been out for years that prescription drugs are a leading cause of death. High-profile cases of prescription drug poisoning in celebrities like Michael Jackson and Heath Ledger have raised awareness of the hazards, but not about the scope of the problem. A new study shows that in the U.S. hospitalizations for poisoning by prescription opioids, sedatives, and tranquilizers increased a total of 65% between 1999 and 2006. This increase is twice the increase observed in hospitalizations for poisoning by other drugs and substances. [Coben JH, Davis SM, Furbee PM, *et al*, "Hospitalizations for Poisoning by Prescription Opioids, Sedatives, and Tranquilizers," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, May 2010; 38(5): 517-524.]

◆ **Childhood Immunization.** Researchers in Japan studied the effects of Vitamin-D supplementation in prevention of influenza A in school children in a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial that compared Vitamin D_3 supplements (1200 IU/d) with a placebo. Influenza A occurred in 18 of 167 (10.8%) children in the Vitamin D_3 group compared with 31 of 167 (18.6%) children in the placebo group. The Vitamin-D supplementation also appeared to reduce the incidence of asthma attacks. [Urashima M, Segawa T, Okazaki M, *et al*, "Randomized trial of vitamin D supplementation to prevent seasonal influenza A in schoolchildren," *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, March 10, 2010; doi:10.3945/ajcn.2009.29094.]

◆ **Beta Amyloid Proteins and Your Health.** Japanese researchers may have developed a test that would detect Alzheimer's disease in its early stages. High levels of beta amyloid protein aggregates detected in the spinal fluid are a likely indicator of Alzheimer's disease development. They showed a direct correlation with high levels of this chemical indicator with confirmed cases of Alzheimer's. Intermediate levels showed some cognitive impairment and low levels with no symptoms of the disease. Other research in early warning for Alzheimer's may result in an eye examination that can help diagnose Alzheimer's at early stages. Lee E. Goldstein, M.D., Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and the Director of the Molecular Aging and Development Laboratory at the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, injects the eye with special drops that bind to the amyloid beta proteins. Under an infrared light, the proteins will fluoresce, indicating the presence of Alzheimer's disease. [Fukumoto H, Tokuda T, Kasai T, et al, High-molecular-weight β-amyloid oligomers are elevated in cerebrospinal fluid of Alzheimer patients. *FASEB Journal*, 2010; DOI: *10.1096/fj.09-150359*.] HFN